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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000581

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SUBJECT: MAIN OPPOSITION CHP LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE -- BAYKAL'S PYRRHIC VICTORY

Classified By: ANKARA 000198

04 ISTANBUL 001729

ANKARA 000501

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04 ANKARA 006839

POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Baykal was re-elected chairman of CHP at the party's convention on 28-29 January. Baykal's re-election marks a significant victory over his key political rivals within the party, but the negative publicity surrounding their leadership struggle and the violent party convention will further weaken the increasingly irrelevant and ineffective CHP. End Summary.

¶2. (C) CHP leader Deniz Baykal was re-elected chairman of CHP with 674 of 1,219 votes cast in the first round at the party's Extraordinary Convention on 28-29 January. Istanbul-Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul received 460 votes, about 100 more than the number of signatures he got to register his candidacy. Eight-five votes were declared invalid, probably because they were cast for candidates that failed to muster enough signatures to be on the official ballot.

¶3. (C) A fight broke out at the convention when Sarigul and his supporters first entered the hall. Several people were hurt and three delegates were hospitalized. Sarigul himself was caught on camera punching the mayor of Bakirkoy. Chaos erupted in the hall and at one point the police had to be called in to restore order. Sarigul and his supporters boycotted the second day of the convention, thereby allowing the Baykal faction to easily elect their slate to the Party Assembly and Disciplinary Board. The convention was carried live on a couple of Turkish television stations and all of Sunday's papers -- except leftist Cumhuriyet -- carried front page pictures of the carnage.

¶4. (C) Baykal gave a three hour speech as party chairman and another fifty minutes speech as a candidate for the party chairmanship. Although his speech was interrupted repeatedly by Sarigul supporters, Baykal -- whom many educated Turks considered a gifted public orator -- provided details about Sarigul's alleged political corruption and alleged efforts to bribe the CHP Disciplinary Board (Refs A and B). Baykal's rhetorical argument -- that he is standing up against the corrupt individuals who have overtaken parts of the party -- cuts two ways. First, because the claim that corruption is rank in the party undermines his own claims to effective leadership of CHP. Second, because, as Baykal supporter Mehmet Nessar (Denizli MP) told us Jan. 31, it raises the question why Baykal offered the prized Antalya mayoral candidacy to Sarigul if Sarigul's corruption was so clear at the time. Baykal also repeated his false claim that a "crusade" has been launched against CHP in retribution for its opposition to the failed 1 March 2003 resolution in the Turkish parliament that would have authorized US troop deployment into Iraq through Turkey (Refs C and D). Sarigul spoke for about an hour and a half, but we agree with media commentators and Embassy contacts who characterized him as ineffective and outclassed by Baykal.

¶5. (C) In the aftermath of the convention, Baykal will move to further consolidate his control of the party and punish the dissidents. Sarigul asserts he will remain in CHP, but others have said that many disgruntled CHPers will leave the party. Nessar told us he understands from Baykal that, in reaction to the apparent support for Sarigul by MP's who had said they would remain loyal to Baykal, about ten CHP MPs will be expelled from the party for having supported Sarigul.

Before the convention, CHP MP Hasan Aydin and former CHP state minister Erol Cevikce told POLOFF separately that CHP dissidents -- including at least twenty MPs -- would leave CHP to form a new leftist or left-of-center party if Baykal won re-election.

¶6. (C) Comment. The convention was a Pyrrhic victory for Baykal because the tactics he employed have only further weakened CHP's reputation with the public and Baykal's standing as leader within the party. Baykal's victory over

Sarigul, moreover, will not end the leadership struggle within CHP (Ref E). This is the third major challenge to Baykal's authoritarian control over the party in the past two years. Baykal's control and manipulation of the CHP party processes have allowed him to maintain control of the party machinery so far, but his popularity and power within the party continue to decline with each contest. He received only 674 votes at this convention, compared to 973 votes for the convention in October 2003 and 781 votes in July 2004. The party will hold another convention in October 2005 and anti-Baykal elements within the party are already working to overthrow him.

17. (C) Concerning Baykal's anti-American campaign (repeatedly throwing out charges that the U.S. was behind the efforts to remove him and to crush the party), Nessar initially implied he could not understand Baykal's motivation when we asked whether Baykal really believes the conspiracy theories or has merely used them to manipulate sentiment. Acknowledging he knew the supposed Pentagon documents implicating the U.S. were rank forgeries, Nessar then weakly suggested that Baykal had merely indulged in a tactic for internal political consumption. However, he listened intently when we underscored how badly Baykal has damaged his and his party's reputation in Washington by indulging in such cheap and mendacious conspiracy-mongering. End Comment.

EDELMAN